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Reflection of Protest by Dam Affected People in Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* and Jackie French Koller's *Someday*

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Abstract:

It can be observed that protest and development are interrelated to each other throughout the history of the mankind. Literary texts pervade with variety of protests of the people in the society. In the other words it can be said that literature records various protests in the lives of the human beings. In the present paper the focus shall be particularly on the select issue i.e. protest of the dam affected people who are forcefully displaced from their native places in order to pave the way for the developmental projects like construction of the dams. For carrying out the present study meaningfully diverse cultures from the different geographical settings have been selected. From the Indian context Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* (2014) and from the Western context Jackie French Koller's *Someday* (2010) shall be considered. Representation of the individual protest and collective protest, women's active participation in the protests in the select novels shall be discussed. The protesters from the select novels are the victims of the developmental project i.e. dam. They try their best to resist their forceful evacuation from their native land. Even though they are completely not successful in preventing the dams to be built it is for sure that they definitely made the authorities to hear their voices of disapproval.

Keywords: Reflection of Protest in literature, Dam affected people, Indian and western context.

Discrimination, injustice, deprivation of any rights, and imposition of ideas, thoughts or

various projects on the marginalized class without their consent give birth to protests. Through the protest an individual or group of people can express their disapproval or objections in words or actions. It may be considered one of the best weapons to make the voices heard from the margins. However, the same is always not easy and smooth task for the protesters to demonstrate their opposition to something.

Protest and Literature

Let us discuss the formal definition of protest. Merriam Webster online dictionary defines protest as “the act of objecting or a gesture of disapproval; a complaint, objection, or display of unwillingness usually to an idea or a course of action.”

James M. Jasper in *Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements* (2014) has rightly explained “...that protest occurs every day, around the planet, and it always has. Most of the time we don't even hear about it – it is not dramatic or sustained long enough for the media to cover it. Protest is a fundamental part of human existence, and every period in history has the potential to bring about important changes (Jasper, 2014: Preface).”

Literature enables its readers to know various aspects of the lives of the people in a society. There is a long tradition of literary protest or the reflection of the real protest in the fictional or such other ways in literature. Observations of the authors are deliberated in the form of fictional works. The attempt of them in writing about protest is to create awareness and sensitize the readers about the injustices around them. In the thesis entitled “Literature of Revolution, Violence and Protest” A. Temjenwala AO states that “Protest as a value and as an effective medium will serve its purpose only if it is used with relevance to real situations obtained in actual life processes. Literature is a good medium to reflect such values through protest. A writer who while struggling or confronting the condition of his times and society, earns values in a new and fresh way and explores them in the context of real life situations.” (Temjenwala, 2012:145)

Protest in Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* and Jackie French Koller's *Someday*

It is observed that protest and development are interrelated to each other throughout the history of the mankind. Literature embodies the protest of the human beings. In the present paper the protest of the dam affected people shall be described and analysed. For the same from the

Indian context Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* (2014) and Jackie French Koller's *Someday* (2010) from the Western context shall be critiqued. In the select novels the protest of the villagers is to the dam construction in the beginning. However, in the first select novel it is continued even after the construction of dam for the justice in the compensation given by the government. There are various trials and errors as far as the protest is concerned. Representation of the individual protest and collective protest, women's active participation in the protests in the select novels shall be discussed.

Individual Protest

The reflection of the individual protest in Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* (2014) is worth describing to understand the phenomenon in Indian context. Sometimes individual characters become active and express their disapproval or put forth their demands where individual protest is seen. In the other time collective protest is seen in the novel.

As stated in "Protest and Literature" by Narendra Mohan "the foundation of protest is laid when man becomes conscious of his rights and for their attainment puts himself body and soul into the struggle; consciousness towards fundamental rights, tendency to struggle and a sense of independence and liberty are the basic ingredients of protest which are liable to come into conflict with the dread power of the establishment. And in this process, human anguish comes into being which raises protest from individualistic level to c level to a maturer, all pervading social level and thus saves protest from becoming insular in its range and meaning," (Mohan, 1975: 92) it is evident in the select novel in case of protest.

Let me bring individual protest evident in the novel for analysis in the present context. The characters like Tarakka Bhosale, Govinda, and Avadai are seen protesting against the construction of the dam in Jambhali in the novel. Both of them with other characters try their best to express their disapproval to the dam. It was known to everyone in the dam construction area that the main person behind the proposed project is Khasdar Shingade Patil. In one of the occasions in the novel Tarakka Bhosale curses the man behind the project openly and loudly. "Shingadya, you will be destroyed, your family wiped out, your government will die." (Patil, 9) Her cursing Shingade Patil at her level and ability is also a means of strong protest even though it is bit aggressive. Her strong disapproval to the dam is evident from her reaction. In addition, it is

also worth to take a notice of her response as a natural villager who might not have through knowledge about the concept of government as an institution. She bursts against the government too. "Tarakka did not approve of the dam project. From her perch, she shouted at the top of her voice, 'Aaya you sarkar-aa! You want to swallow this village, drown our homes? Wait, you bastards, when your whores and brats come out on the street, you will know our grief.'" (Patil, 27)

The next character, Govinda also has his crucial role as far as the protest is concerned. Unlike the other characters he doesn't oppose or protest verbally in front of the other villagers to the planned project. He himself has got psychologically depressed when he realized that he has to leave his native place and get settled down in the place the government is going to allot to the dam affected people. Because of the same he lost his mental balance. In the other words he got mentally disturbed. "'Where do I go now? What alien land will they send me to? If we had all gone together ... Ma-eee, Kalubai,' Govinda whimpered, dabbing his eyes with a corner of his dhoti." (Patil, 29) After the destruction of his home, crops in his farm he could not bear the loss of the same with his bare eyes. He takes the decision which none could even think of. He decided to prefer death for the displacement. He ends his life by jumping into well. "Babu and Mhaknya jumped into the freezing water and splashed around, Babu's foot caught in something. He took a deep breath and went under. His hands found a shirt end. He yanked it hard and Govinda's cold wet body floated up." (Patil, 30)

The next important women character in the novel is Avadai. Her individual protest is worth considering in the present context. Her protest is natural and very strong to the proposed dam project and the same is continued even after the construction of the dam in the resettlement issues. The first protest of Avadai is explicitly seen at the time of foundation laying ceremony. LalaJadhav had arranged the Irrigation Minister to lay the foundation for the dam. However, at the time of actual function Avadai reacted to the event in such a way that the *bhoomi pooja* (foundation laying ceremony of the project) itself got affected and the guest had to leave the place immediately seeking assistance from the police. Consequently, Avadai was taken into the custody the next day morning.

"It was an impressive gathering. All the villagers from the drought affected areas had turned up. The Minister was given a traditional welcome by the women. Avadai, of the Jadhav family, was one of them. The ceremony was about to begin. The Minister was

waiting for the pujari's instructions, when Avadai happened to look up towards the river. And suddenly, the waters of Vaghjai flooded her eyes. In the raging waters, she saw Jambhli getting submerged, Kalubai drowning, houses collapsing, helpless animals floundering. She could not let it happen. She turned on the Minister and kicked the puja thali right out of his hands. Pandemonium broke loose. The welcome turned to hostility as the women closed in on the minister, urging Avadai on as she screamed, 'You want to destroy us so that your families can prosper? Have you no shame, no decency?' The few policemen present managed to whisk the Minister and his officials to the waiting car. A barrage of stones followed them as they drove off in a cloud of dust. The bhoomi puja was thwarted once more. The next day, more than half of Jambhli, including Avadai, Khairmode Guruji, Pandu Yetal, was taken into custody and held for a full six days." (Patil, 12-13)

It is not that Avadai was against development and the construction of dam itself; she honestly and openly fought for the justice to the project affected people. The same is evident from her views on the project when Khasdar Baburao Shingade came to Avadai's house to convince her not to include Raghu's name in Haibati murder case. "Saheb, what's a dam? Build ten more if you wish. Progress, develop. Why destroy us in the process? My kunku was wiped off by the dam, I bore it. What did you gain by uprooting the plant I had nurtured in my lap?" (Patil, 406-461) Even then Khasdar was insisting on not to include the name of Raghu in the murder case of Haibati, Avadai's son. She was so determined to protest to the same that even to the Khasdar she didn't become submissive and accepted whatever he asked her to. Even though she was a common woman whose life was ruined by the dam she was not ready to accept defeat easily. Her objection to not to include Raghu's name in the Haibati murder case was very strong. "No sarkar.' Avadai's voice cracked. 'That Bhadya smashed my child's head in front of my eyes. Do you think our children are tamarind seeds? That Raghya has terrorized the entire region. By not taking his name, you want me to betray my own boy, saheb?'" (Patil, 461) In addition when Khasdar's PA Kulkarni tried the other way by placing a heavy cloth bag near Avadai's feet to persuade her to accept what Khasdar told about the murder case. However, she strongly objected to it. "Avadai erupted. She lost control. 'Saheb, you are respectable people so I am telling you. Pick up that filth. Or else my chappal will come into my hand!' she screamed... 'Bastards, go back the way you've come. Blacken your faces. My earth never taught me to

smash one's children and then betray them. Take that muck with you!" (Patil, 461)

Acquisition of the land for the dam project was over and the government was giving the compensation to the dam affected people. The protest of the former inhabitants of the place is also important for not getting the proper compensation. One of the villagers, Kusharaja's reaction to the announced compensation speaks out his rejection to the meagre compensation announced to him. His response to the question ("Raje, do you accept the compensation?") asked by the officer is lively example of his disapproval to it. His answer is: "Saheb, we break of a piece of our heart for you and you pay us the rate of dirt for it! Tell the sarkar to keep it, saheb. They might run short when building the dam." (Patil, 98)

Unlike Vishwas Patil's characters' individual and collective protest to the dam Jackie French Koller's *Someday* (2010) represents mostly the individual's protest. However, Gran's individual protest is understood at the outset itself that it is turning out to be mere individual protest with no fruitful outcome. This is merely for the love of the native. In the novel the Wheeler's family consisting three members (Gran, Helen, and Cecelia) is found. The village, this family has been part of, is going under water with the coming of Quabbin water reservoir which is planned by Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission (MDWSC).

In the form of the protest Gran does not take very seriously the letters sent to her in connection with the land from MDWSC. The same is evident from the novel. The letter received conveys the message that the Wheeler's family should move out of their house and town by the coming April so that MSWSC can start the flooding. Gran's granddaughter, Cecelia expresses her fear that by the April she will not be able to complete her school. As usual Mama (Cecilia's mother) shows her no hesitation to vacate the house. But Gran does not accept the notice to leave the place. She tells Cecilia very confidently, "Don't you worry none, Cecelia... we aren't going anywhere." (Koller, 26) When Mama reminds Gran that it's official notice Gran responds to it with charged emotions, "Official, my foot... She took the letter from Mama's hand and crumpled it, then she opened the stove door and tossed it in." (Koller, 26) In addition Gran also gives the confidence to her granddaughter that she would be able to complete her school in her village, Enfield only. She says, "don't pay no never mind to that letter. You young folks have gone to school right here in Enfield all eight grades, and by golly you're going to have your graduation come June jest like you deserve." (Koller, 26)

The MDWSC sends the representative to convince Gran but she does not accept the proposal and in turn questions the acquisition of her land.

“Mrs. Wheeler,” said Jake, “I’ve been sent out here from the Boston office to help tie up loose ends and close out the relocation project. I’ve already been to see Doc Seaver and Mr. Peters. Thought you would like to know they’ve both agreed to sell. You’re about the only one left.”... “That don’t make no nevermind to me,” Gran said. “Don’t you tell me that!” snapped Gran, her eyes smoldering. She shook a finger in Jacob Taylor’s face, “Don’t you dare tell me you understand, young man. Is anybody takin’ yer home away? Is anybody tell’ you to get off the land your people have farmed for two hunert years?” (Koller, 52)

Collective Protest

The need for the collective protest against the government is understood as necessity to make the voice heard of the dam victims. Khairmode Guruji is the central figure in Patil’s novel to organise the people and protest against the government.

“All these Khairmode Guruji and Jambhlikars had been agitating to prevent the project. Guruji, recalling his experience with the Koyna victims, warned the people, ‘Carrying our homes on our backs moving to a new location is like counting stars in board daylight. Not even a dog will care about our plight.’ (Patil 12).

The practice of the collective protest in Patil’s novel may be grasped through the following textual reference.

A non-cooperation movement was set in motion. Nobody would accept tax notices sent from the district headquarters. Even the revenue officials were in awe of Guruji, so they came to Jambhli reluctantly, stealthily. They brought black police vans to escort them. The women of Jambhli too defied them, obstructed their vans. Run over us first, then measure the area. They challenged the officials. ‘We will die before we let you build this dam,’ was their slogan. Under strict police surveillance, the dam site was marked out. Three times the bhoomi puja was performed. Each time the minister and his party would appear on the banks of the Vaghjai, lay a foundation stone and go away. As soon as their

cars were out of sight, the village youth would uproot the stone and toss it into the river. So the construction of the dam was never begun.” (Patil, 12)

In Jackie French Koller's *Someday* Gran did not stay only with her protest in her house; she took the initiation and made a group of people ready to present the dams site people's requests to allow them to stay for some more days. The same was approved. “The April 1 deadline came and went, and we stayed on. Gran had mustered a group of citizens to speak out at the town meeting back in February about how the town's children should be allowed to finish out the school year, and as usual, she got her way.” (Koller, 40)

Active Participation of Women in Protest

Women of Jambhli village were also not silent in showing their opposition to the construction of the dam and evacuation of the village for the same purpose. To the government's plan to take the people away from the village by bringing black police vans the women of Jambhli protested strongly. “The women of Jambhli too defied them, obstructed their vans. ‘Run over us first, then measure the area’, they challenged the officials. ‘We will die before we let you build this dam’, was their slogan.” (Patil, 12)

The protest represented in the select novels may be studied in comparison from where the similarities and differences among them may be highlighted. However, the present study creates awareness among the people who are made to protest or register their disapproval to the decisions, projects or such other phenomenon. Even though it is an attempt to study the literary portrayal of the protest to the planned project the same may not be divorced from the real life of the people in the world. The protest of the characters from Vishwas Patil's *A Dirge for the Dammed* and Jackie French Koller's *Someday* is symbolic to the people who are going through the similar struggle in their lives.

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